

# *Among the Musk Ox People*

by Mary Ruefle

Carnegie Mellon University Press

## A Reading and Discussion Guide

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### **SUMMARY:**

Mary Ruefle, author of *Memling's Veil*, *Life Without Speaking*, *The Adamant*, *Cold Pluto*, and *Post Meridian* has published her seventh volume of poetry, *Among the Musk Ox People*. In this collection, full of insight and subtle humor, readers will enjoy uncovering the themes, thoughts, and emotions of these poems -- relishing the moment when the play of words and meaning suddenly becomes clear. Beautifully composed, you will want to dive into these poems again and again.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Read "Among the Musk Ox People" (p.12) aloud. Who are the Musk Ox People? How does your understanding of this term help you to understand the title poem?
2. What words would you use to describe the style of "Among the Musk Ox People?" What do you think the author is trying to convey by writing in this way? Do you find it effective? Why or why not?
3. Discuss your individual reactions to -- and interpretations of -- this poem.
4. As a group, decide on three or four other poems to discuss in detail. Read the poems aloud first and then review the style of each poem as well as your reactions / interpretations. If there are unfamiliar words or terms in these poems, review them together.
5. After a discussion of the individual poems, look at the collection as a whole. Why do you think the author titled it *Among the Musk Ox People*? What (if any) themes can you detect in this volume?
6. What did you find, in particular, drew you into the book?
7. Would you read more of this poet's works? Why or why not?

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Reprinted from [Ploughshares](#): Fall, 1995

Mary Ruefle was born outside of Pittsburgh in 1952. The daughter of a military officer, she spent the first twenty years of her life moving around the U.S. and Europe, and graduated from Bennington College in 1974 with a degree in literature. She attended the writing program at Hollins College, but admits that for many years she was a drifter, holding a variety of jobs in different places. “Nothing led me to writing but *reading*,” says Ruefle, “and since I began to write poems as soon as I could read them, it never occurred to me to take anything else seriously—which later turned out to be sad.”

Her work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, and she is the author of three books, *Memling’s Veil*, *Life Without Speaking*, and *The Adamant*, which co-won the 1988 Iowa Poetry Prize. Ruefle has received grants from the Vermont Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and awards from *The Black Warrior Review*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*. She has taught at Bennington College, Colby College, the University of Michigan, and in China. Currently, she lives in Vermont and teaches in the M.F.A. program at Vermont College.

## HELPFUL LINKS:

The Academy of American Poets profile of [Mary Ruefle](#)

UCTV “[Lunch Poems](#)” talk by Mary Ruefle



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